

EARLY IMPACT OF THE PHASE I MEDIA CAMPAIGN

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Preliminary Results, Subject to Change

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INTRODUCTION

In order to gauge the early impact of the Phase I Media Campaign, CSR polled a small sample of community representatives in each of the 12 Target communities, 8 weeks after the campaign had been initiated. These community representatives include directors of prevention programs, school representatives, community coalition workers, law enforcement officials, and leaders of other programs that work with young people. Their comments offered us valuable insights. They tell us how the campaign is working in each community, pinpointing areas of early progress and offering a glimpse of longer-term impacts.

AWARENESS OF CAMPAIGN

First, CSR asked individuals about their awareness of anti-drug ads. Almost all of those interviewed (97%) reported that they have seen these ads in the past 8 weeks. In order to assess whether these ads are part of the Phase I ONDCP campaign, CSR asked them to note any changes in anti-drug ads during the past two months. Almost 90 percent (88.8%) noted one or more of the following: a change in the frequency of the ads, a shift in the distribution of ads by media type, an increase in the frequency of ads shown during “prime time,” or some other change that could be associated with the campaign currently sponsored by ONDCP. Specific comments capture the reaction to particular components of the campaign:

- A business leader in Portland reported that the ads “are much improved, more frequent and more widely shown...they are being aired during family-oriented hours...” He thinks the campaign should continue.
- A school official in Tucson finds the ads in the newspapers very powerful, particularly those targeted to adults.
- A representative of the police department in Alexandria, Virginia, recommended that the ad campaign continue. He noted that “it will be even more important in the spring” when young people have more free time on their hands.
- A community organizer in Sioux City, Iowa, commented that the “frequency of advertising has been quite impressive, particularly in the newspapers and on billboards”.
- A community coalition leader in Baltimore applauded the “eye-catching” character of the new billboards.
- A prevention worker in Houston described the ads as “positive and well made”. She hopes that they continue to reinforce messages so important to youth.

- A prevention coalition leader in a large eastern city observed that her colleagues are talking about the new campaign; they are particularly excited about the “hard hitting” tone of some of the ads. One of them has noted that there is no “sugar-coating” in these ads.
- A school representative in Boise, Idaho, believes that future messages must stress that marijuana today is not like the milder pot of the 1960s; “it’s a different, more potent drug today.” Parents must stress that the drug is more dangerous now.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO CAMPAIGN

CSR then asked the community representatives to comment on their perception of the community’s response to the new ad campaign. Eighty percent reported that people in their community are talking about the ads. This heightened awareness of anti-drug ads is encouraging, given the short time frame in which they have been aired. Their individual comments provide useful perspectives on the kinds of changes that may be attributed to the campaign:

- A police sergeant in Baltimore reported that kids in D.A.R.E. classes are talking about the new ads and how they relate to their D.A.R.E. lessons.
- A community coalition leader in Denver reported that about 90 percent of parents attending a recent PTA meeting had seen the ads and responded favorably to them. He believes that a recent increase in requests for information from parents can be attributed to the campaign.
- A prevention worker in Atlanta has witnessed an upswing in requests for presentations to parent groups as a result of the new campaign. She believes that this campaign is the first major effort to target parents’ attention on the dangers of inhalants.
- A community prevention worker in Sioux City, Iowa, noted that parents are showing increased interest in working with youth on how to deal with substance abuse. In response to seeing one of the ads, a parent asked the prevention worker “whether we really have a meth problem in our community?” The prevention worker used the opportunity to role play with the parent on how she can better educate her daughter to deal with peer pressure and drug use.
- A staff member with a Youth Prevention Program in Washington, D.C. reported that the community response has been very favorable. He said that teens are both shocked and grateful for the amount of information being presented. He believes that the ads are giving teens more ammunition to say no to drugs. He also notes that the ads are catching the attention of parents who are re-evaluating the need to spend more time talking with their kids about drugs.
- A policewoman in Alexandria, Virginia, reported that the members of the school staff with whom she works are expressing their appreciation for this important effort. They believe that the ads are thought-provoking and that they are getting the attention of kids and parents alike.

- A prevention coalition worker in Portland noted that they are receiving more calls from parents asking for additional materials that address the information communicated by the ads.
- Prevention workers in Milwaukee favor the ads that feature mentoring because this approach supports their ongoing focus on building resiliency skills among youth.

These positive comments are balanced by sound advice from community representatives who recognize that it is still too soon to predict long-term changes in youths' attitudes and behavior. The design of the evaluation of ONDCP's media campaign respects these lessons learned from earlier research. We realize that it takes approximately 3 years to change behavior. This was confirmed by some of the community workers interviewed:

- A Washington, D.C., teen counselor noted that it takes kids time to process what they are seeing; they need to think about the information presented by the campaign: "Because kids take things a step at a time, so do we. We need to get underneath what's happening and this kind of ad helps us to do that."
- A Prevention Coalition leader commented that it is too early to detect a change in youth behavior. However, she did note that there has been an increase in dialogue among the local prevention councils.
- A law enforcement official in Houston believes that it is too early to determine if people have been influenced by the ads. Nevertheless, she is optimistic because she has noticed a decided increase in the number of requests for information on drug use.
- A number of respondents stressed the need for the campaign to make better use of radio stations and community newspapers that target primarily minority groups. (Several respondents did comment favorably on new billboards presenting messages in Spanish.)

ROLLOUT COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES SUPPORTIVE OF CAMPAIGN

Finally, we asked community representatives whether they are aware of any specific local or regional efforts that have been undertaken to support the ONDCP campaign. The following kinds of complementary or rollout community activities have been reported to date:

- A worker with a Washington, D.C., based recovery program noted that his agency's new hotline number was included in one of the new ads. Since that time, the number of calls to the hotline has increased from one or two calls to about 15 calls per day. He believes that the ads have helped the hotline to get off the ground, and he expects an increase in calls this spring.
- A prevention community worker in Sioux City, Iowa, believes that the community has become more interested in drug prevention and that this heightened

commitment is related to the campaign. Drug prevention leaders in the area are tracking youths' response to the ads when they meet with them.

- A CADCA representative in San Diego reported that they are planning to expand the existing campaign on methamphetamine. Their intent is to build a community collaborative effort that will build on and support ONDCP's campaign.
- A school representative in Milwaukee noted that a local committee has been formed to monitor the media campaign. This committee includes representatives from the governor's office and the Milwaukee Council on Drugs and Alcohol.
- A counselor in Boise, Idaho, reported that the Idaho Migrant Council and Image de Idaho are sponsoring a "Hispanic Issues Training Council" and she hopes that ONDCP will participate in this effort.

Many other respondents reported other community-based prevention efforts which they did not attribute to the ONDCP media campaign, either because the effort pre-dated the beginning of the campaign or because the respondent had not yet learned about the origin of the community activity. These community-based activities will be closely monitored as the evaluation of the campaign continues.

SUMMARY

In summary, community workers and leaders are very aware of the new ads in newspapers, on billboards, on the radio, and, in particular, on prime time television. There are early indicators that community members, including parents, are paying attention to the campaign, and that parents are beginning to spend more time talking with their children about drugs. Lastly, there is evidence that other groups in these target sites are initiating community-based efforts to complement and support ONDCP's media campaign.